2011 Wrap-up

Clearly the biggest elections issue in state legislatures in 2011 was voter ID, but there were a handful of other notable trends, even if they largely slipped under the radar of the national media.

Voter ID

A total of 34 states considered voter ID legislation this year. Four states enacted new laws - Kansas, Mississippi (a citizen initiative, rather than a bill) Rhode Island and Wisconsin. Another four passed laws to make existing voter ID laws stricter - Alabama, South Carolina, Tennessee and Texas.

Voter ID bills in Massachusetts, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Ohio remain pending in 2011 and will carry over into 2012 if they do not receive a failing vote before the end of the year. Bills in Alaska, Delaware, Illinois, Iowa, Maine, Nebraska and New York will also carry over into the 2012 legislative session.

Primary Date Changes

A number of states adjusted the dates for primary elections this year. California, the District of Columbia, Maryland and New Jersey made the cost-saving move of consolidating the state and presidential primaries into a single date. Alabama, Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Virginia and Wisconsin moved away from the very early presidential primary dates they used in 2008, returning to a date later in the spring for 2012. Washington canceled its presidential primary entirely, leaving it up to the political parties to nominate candidates as they see fit. Colorado, Maryland, Oklahoma and Wisconsin adjusted their state primary dates to comply with deadlines established by the MOVE Act.

More Primary Date Changes Possible

Massachusetts moved its 2012 state primary to September 6, but may have to move it again because that date conflicts with the Democratic National Convention. Texas may also have to move its primary date soon to accommodate delays in redistricting. New York’s September state primary runs afoot of the deadlines imposed by the MOVE Act, and the state is currently involved in a lawsuit that could end with a new, earlier state primary date for 2012. An Ohio bill that is pending on the governor’s desk would change the date for all primaries to March 6. That would be the second change this year to the 2012 primary dates for Ohio.
2011 Wrap-Up, cont’d.

**MOVE Act**
Implementation of the federal Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment Act continued to be a high priority for state legislatures throughout 2011. Legislation was introduced in 20 states plus Washington, D.C., and enacted in 13 states and the District of Columbia.

**Vote Centers**
New laws in Arizona and Utah will allow county election officials to use vote centers instead of or in addition to precinct polling places. Indiana replaced its vote center pilot program with a new statewide program that will permit any county to use vote centers. A new law in New Mexico will allow counties to consolidate precincts to make voting more convenient. Tennessee and Texas re-established and expanded pilot projects to test vote centers.

**National Popular Vote**
California and Vermont joined the NPV compact this year, bringing the total number of electoral votes committed to the compact to 132 of 270 needed for it to take effect.

**Session News**
Just eight legislatures meet year-round; five remain in session: Massachusetts, Michigan, New Jersey, Ohio and Pennsylvania.

Four legislatures will not hold regular sessions in 2012: Montana, Nevada, North Dakota and Texas. Several legislatures hold very short sessions in even years - Arkansas, Florida, Indiana, Kansas, New Mexico, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia and Wyoming will convene in January or February and adjourn in March.

By the end of January, 39 of the 46 legislatures that hold regular sessions in 2012 will have convened. Those convening during the first two weeks of January are:
- January 3: Kentucky, Mississippi, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and Vermont
- January 4: California, Indiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Missouri, Nebraska, New Hampshire and New York
- January 9: Georgia, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, and Washington
- January 10: Arizona, Delaware, Florida, New Jersey, South Dakota, Tennessee and Wisconsin
- January 11: Colorado, Illinois, Maryland, Michigan, South Carolina, Virginia and West Virginia
- January 13: Wyoming

View the [2012 legislative session calendar](#).